

The Law of Compassion

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Compassion refers to a deep awareness of and sympathy for another's suffering. It has been advocated by gurus, spiritual leaders, guides, religious leaders and various assorted New Age healers. Its importance has been reiterated across the centuries and the cultures. Yet, like every rebel, the one thing we are asked to do is the one thing we don't do. One can consider the possible relevance of compassion for the human species. In the evolutionary perspective, it has been considered that compassion allows for the survival of fellow members of the same species, thereby strengthening the possibility of the survival of the human race, which after all is the end-goal. In the social perspective, it allows for peaceful and harmonious coexistence. In the economic sense, it allows all members equal opportunity to develop and progress. In the technological sense, it apparently has no relevance since technology is based on bits and bytes of data, not compassion.

The fast-paced life of today, with its quick decisions, instant gratifications, time-bound moralities and impatient values may not see much sense and purpose in a concept as ancient and passé as compassion. There is no immediate reward, there appears to be no purpose in the short-term, there isn't much going in terms of financial benefits and appears to be a psychological equivalent of the vestigial remnants of a bygone era. A look at the real-world problems of today may help one examine the fruitfulness or wastefulness of the phenomenon called compassion. The most obvious societal disasters; poverty, malnutrition, violence, climate change and environmental pollution; all of these promise a large scale extermination, if not complete annihilation of the human race. There are so many organisations working towards helping the world and it's inhabitants, human and non-human, survive this march towards destruction. The WHO, the World Bank, the International Red Cross, Green Cross, Blue Cross, Amnesty International, the UN and it's various arms UNESCO, UNICEF are all working towards saving this planet and all on it.

Considering the diversity of the problems, the wide range of crises and the myriad populations that need help, it seems logical that there should be specialized organizations that cater to the needs of each group and address their concerns specifically. The entire planet is teetering on the high heels of corruption, greed and violence. If one were told that the solution to all these problems can be found at one place, that there is a one stop shop that caters to all the needs of the planet, that each group will find custom-made solutions to it's problems; one might possibly consider this hallucinatory or illusory. Yet when one tries to understand the basic premise for the breakdown of this entire planet, for the disease that has set in the system, for the rot that has infested all of us; one will realise it all boils down to human weakness, a weakness manifested through greed and insecurity.

Mankind has gotten used to being the most powerful creature on this planet simply because of certain cognitive abilities missing in all other creatures. Sure there are intelligent animals and even plants in the non-human kingdom, but there aren't many that can pursue a goal through challenges and obstacles and find a way to achieve it in spite of adversity and hardship. The stoic nature of humans which many people seem to have rechristened or understood as resilience has been a double-edged sword. It's no longer about breaking down in the face of trouble, because of this wonderful ability to 'bounce back' and the power to hold one's head high irrespective of the outcome. The value of this ability is now in serious doubt. This ability to hold on to one's dreams and desires has been exalted and glorified as a powerful tool to achieve success. However, the definition of success has now changed. In the early ages, the collectivist societies defined success far differently than how it is defined today. The dreams and desires shared by many today do not care about the common good. What seems to be missing is an essential and ancient capacity of human beings to empathize, to show compassion for everything around oneself, living and non-living. The cultures of the past that somehow emphasized compassion in the treatment of self and others have slowly given way to other philosophies that have no relation to well being in self and others.

Consider environmental degradation. The constant need for huge profits, the lack of concern for nature and the short-sighted focus on financial gain is the root cause of the ecological disaster on this planet. If only the people concerned could have some compassion for the environment, for future generations and even for the present generation which are facing extremes of climatic aberrations; if only people would show some compassion, we would have had a more habitable planet to live on and a cleaner planet to pass on to the next generation. The economic policies of developed nations, the trade agreements which send unhealthy industries to developing nations, the embargoes and sanctions imposed under various self-righteous pretexts, all could be avoided if there was a basic sense of compassion for others. Another huge gaping hole is in compassion for self. The violence with which people treat their physical and mental selves, the toxic infusion of chemicals and artificial products in to the body, the caustic psychological infusion of emotional dysfunction and stress based lifestyles, serve no healthy purpose. Maladaptive behaviours are the norm and healthy adaptive ones are looked at with scorn and mistrust.

Compassion as a way of life can help overcome these life-threatening situations. It can save the planet and all on it. The question is whether compassion is a feasible alternative to all the other organisations running around trying to save the world. In their case, it appears to be too little, too late. What is needed is a massive worldwide movement to break the existing system and build a newer healthier more adaptive system. The current education system that teaches children the laws of the physical world has to be modified and restructured. The new law that has to dominate is the Law of Compassion. There are studies in the field of consciousness that scientifically measure the positive effects of love and compassion in the treatment of diseased bodies. There is empirical evidence that thoughts that are positive can affect matter differently from thoughts that are negative. Since the current scientific temperament focuses on measurable sciences, one needs to bring the study of compassion into the purview of such specific measurables. With the advances in technology, such studies are possible and have been happening. Institutes across the world are using advanced neuro-scientific equipment to measure and document the benefits of positive healthy thoughts

and emotions. The Institute of Noetic Sciences, various parapsychology departments of reputed universities, many cognitive science departments and several reputed scientists attached to hi-tech labs, have all come to the conclusion that there's something out there that regular science has failed to understand and address thus far. If this is indeed true, then it appears that the one stop shop for all the planet's problems has been located. Compassion regulates emotions and decisions affecting self and immediate environment. The ripple effect generated will reach out to scores of people across the globe and make the world a lot more habitable, it will create opportunities for growth and flourishing. All the worldly problems that have beset nations can be peacefully and amicably resolved if a way is found to put forward the concept of love and compassion. More and more people seem to find this alternative far more fruitful and even logical as compared to the mad rush for wealth and power. As we reach what author Malcolm Gladwell calls "the tipping point," the change will be dramatic and far-reaching.

The solution seems simplistic and therefore also naive and foolish. The readers are hence encouraged to identify a current global problem that can't be resolved with compassion. It requires understanding of human behaviour, causes of human weakness and techniques to develop adaptive thought and behaviour. Armed with this knowledge, it is difficult to say that compassion does not work. It involves knowing the person, identifying the causes of maladaptive thought and behaviour and consequently techniques to develop the opposite in them. Compassion works !

REFERENCES

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